

I have been thinking about the problem of defining Black feminism for the last few weeks. I tried to arrive at a succinct statement and finally concluded that for me, the bottom line is that Black feminism takes Black women seriously.

The following are some random notes I made (with the thought of writing an article) shortly after the Eastern Regional Conference of NBFO, November 1973.

I thought of my family. Of course it did not take this conference to cause me to examine their lives. It was a family of women. However, it was not a matriarchy. It seems foolish to have to say this "x" years after Moynihan. It is pathetic and unbearably poignant that anyone would refer to my family as matriarchal. We were a group of Black women---three generations of us--living in one household and trying to survive. Without male assistance and without the slightest interest in our success or failure on the part of the so-called "larger society."

I thought of how women in my family died too soon or without dignity because they were poor and Black and could not pay enough for humane care.

I cannot recollect a woman in my family who was not at some time underemployed. Some were all of their lives. There was a great aunt who was a teacher in the South for many years. She had gone to normal school. When she came up North she became a domestic, taking care of children and being a companion to people who were elderly or disabled. Another great aunt worked as a cook but might have preferred work that used her mind which she had taken great pains to develop. My mother, who, although she had received a bachelor's degree from a segregated Southern school, was not qualified to teach in Cleveland. And so she spent much of her working life before she died at the age of 34 as a cashier in a supermarket.

I recall my grandmother telling a story of how Theodore Roosevelt's daughter visited her little town in Georgia when my grandmother was a girl. The town turned out to see her. As they watched someone asked my grandmother, "Do you think you're as good as the President's daughter?" My grandmother replied, "Yes, I do." I remember the pride in her voice as she ~~said~~ these words. I have often marvelled at that story and felt sad about it too. What courage it must have taken for a ~~young~~ Black girl at that time, in that place, to affirm that not only was she as good as a white person but that ^{she was} even equal to Alice Roosevelt. I have wondered ~~why that town~~ at the pain that that story evokes. I realize now that it's source is not the pity I felt for my grandmother's innocence (she did not know her place) but the anger ~~that came from~~ at the society that did not place a similar value on her thus making her words appear foolish and her life ironic.

For the first time I felt that perhaps I could carry out the faith of those women, could achieve their hopes in my lifetime.

As Blacks and women in this society we have had to be complete realists. This will be to our advantage. I did not hear empty rhetoric there [at the Conference]. I heard women talking about the work that must be done. I heard women expressing their deep concern, respect and even love for one another.